

# NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTER



In the flow of religious thought and practice,  
Unitarians represent openness and inquiry in the spiritual quest.



## FELLOWSHIP MATTERS

We regret that Joan Wilkinson, who had been acting secretary of the Fellowship for the last year, was not able to continue as she indicated in her notes in the March/April issue. In thanking her for her work of the past year we couple with it our gratitude that she will remain a member of the Committee so her wisdom and long experience of the NUF will continue to be available to us in the future.

Following discussion among the committee members present at the Annual Meetings held at Swansea in April, I offered to take on the role in a temporary capacity with the assistance of other committee members so that the work of the Fellowship could go forward.

I am very pleased to welcome three new committee members – Ella Lewis Jones, Ian Martin and Alan Oates. I have already had reason to be grateful for their advice along with the support of the whole committee and officers in the management of the Fellowship.

With this edition we also have to extend especial thanks to Lucy Harris who is relinquishing the onerous and time-consuming task of Distributor for both the Newsletter and the Viewpoint, a role that she has performed most efficiently for some years. The new distributor will be announced in the next issue.

Members of the Unitarian Internet Forum will be especially sad to learn of the sudden passing of Jim Fowler, an NUF member from Cumbria, whose stunning photographs of birds and wildlife were a regular and welcome feature of the site.

The Annual NUF week-end will be held at Great Hucklow 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> November with the theme – “Sacred Texts”. A draft outline of the programme is available on the NUF website. The cost is £94 for the week-end inclusive of accommodation and all meals from Friday evening to Sunday lunch. There is a single room supplement of £5 per night and en suite supplement of £7.50 per night. A deposit of £20 sent to the Treasurer (payable to NUF) will secure a place.

Whether the holiday period takes you to far flung destinations or you have opted for a vacation nearer home, I hope you are able to enjoy a relaxing change of scene and pace during the coming months.

*Ken Smith* (Acting Secretary)

*Cover Composition:* ‘Towards the Light’ by Naomi Linnell (See p. 5)  
The new look cover was designed by Naomi.

## THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE AS TIME GOES BY

Isaac Newton woke up one morning, stretched, scratched, 'put a leg in a pant' and had an idea. A good one he thought and began to consider its implications, consequences, variations, ramifications and applications. A servant looking for him found him hours later still with only one leg clothed, still thinking. What a wonderful time he must have had. Losing all track of time in total absorption is sheer bliss.

We can, of course, measure time in a formal practical way by clocks and calendars but for all of us in our various situations and circumstances time seems to run unevenly according to our involvement with it. Generally it goes much faster when we are happy and more slowly when we are miserable.

The boy who, with two sheets of cardboard, one filled with figures and the other with slots produced an end-of-term-ometer to be able to see at a glance how many weeks, days, hours, minutes and seconds to the end of term was perhaps betwixt these two states. He would have cheered to see his duration visibly shortening but may have found a sneaky pleasure in making the end-of-term-ometer.

In the recent winter's flu epidemic school children were urged to wash their hands thoroughly. The very youngest had no idea for how long this should be done. Then some genius said as long as it took to sing 'Happy Birthday'. I leave you to imagine a Nursery class adorned with soapy bubbles splashing away and singing 'Happy Birthday', all with very clean hands. Time was probably flying for them. Well timed!

The teenager who was propping up the wall informed me that he had nothing to do to pass the time on and was bored. 'Bored' I reflected came late into the language in the 15 and 1600's. Before that most of our ancestors toiled long hours and then, exhausted, slept. Not much spare time to be bored. The teenager eventually killed his spare time with a dose of television.

Finally, a scene at a crematorium. Aged Aunt's funeral. Hobbling down the aisle on a couple of sticks came her equally aged brother-in-law. Enter jovial, friendly Minister who greeted him with "Now take your time. Don't hurry. We've plenty of time. Twenty minutes in fact!" Time running out.

Hoping that your summer months are full of absorbing ideas and pleasant occupations and that time will go by easily for you. If you are waiting for it to pass because of exam or other results remember that time will pass. It always does.

Best wishes  
*Dorothy Archer*

'Time goes you say? Ah not so. Alas, time stays. We go'.

*H. A. Dobson*

## THE MINISTER'S MUSINGS

From time to time I have little obsessions about people. This one began after I had watched a programme on TV about L. Frank Baum, who wrote the Wizard of Oz. What an interesting character. He had tried the theatre, owned his own company and wrote melodramas with himself in the leading role. Then he went on to run a grocery store and next a newspaper with himself as editor. Eventually a friend suggested he did something he was naturally good at and that was to tell children stories. So at the age of forty something he began to earn thousands of dollars instead of small hundreds and the world met Dorothy. After reading about his life, I realised how much of what he believed was incorporated into the Oz story. His wife's family were involved in the Suffragette movement and were leaders in the field of equal rights for women. They criticised Christianity for making women subservient because they were expected to suffer and obey in a man's world. Their place was always to be second. Frank Baum and his wife Maud were also Theosophists. Theosophists did believe in the equality of all people and that religion and science went together. Religions were open to scientific analysis as well as everything else. Not bad for the end of the nineteenth century which we think of as being so conformist.

Dorothy therefore has all these qualities. She speaks to everyone as an equal and they speak to her as one. She is able to find solutions to the problems they face on their yellow brick road journey and the three companions treat her as one of the group. There is no condescending language or decisions made without her. I also found it interesting that the three characters, the scarecrow, tin man and lion all display the characteristics which they say they lack - thinking, heart and courage.

If everyone was able to be like them, what a wizard world we would live in - but we can create one for ourselves by copying them.

With Best Wishes  
*Tony McNeile*

### **The Hucklow House Party, 4 - 6 November**

You are invited to relax at the NUF House Party this autumn in the setting of the beautiful Derbyshire countryside. We enjoy good food, there is a country pub twenty yards away and there will be time to enjoy the local scene. The theme is 'Sacred Writings'. We are going to read some and write some of our own but we are also going to enjoy one another's company.

To join us, please book direct with the Nightingale Centre, telephone 01298 871218 or online at [www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk](http://www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk).

Cost for the week-end is £94. Supplements - en-suite + £7.50, single room + £5, single in en-suite £12.50. Day rate £13.00.

Please book early.

*Tony McNeile*

## REFLECTIONS

### OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

*'... a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path'* Psalm 119

“... and so, my dearest Aunt, to the last epic term of my course for which you have so generously provided. For my final Assignment I was given an old manuscript, *E Tenebris in Lucem*, and told to study it from board to board. Never have I found a task so hard. Getting into the book was no problem, quartered oak is my cover of choice and a pleasure to devour, but the elegant hand of the text and the miniatures illuminated with malachite and lapis lazuli, hammered gold and cinnabar, told a story so shocking that I felt I was making a diabolical journey through a land of macabre fantasy.

I walk in a dark forest, where the dense foliage overwhelms the light and the stony path has no visible ending. I peer out between the massive trunks and I can see a landscape of savage beauty and wretched tragedy. A great wall of water, Leviathan risen from the ocean, pounds inexorably across the land, casually destroying everything in its path – whole villages smashed, animals trees and men tossed together into the air like feathers in the wind. There are small children working long cruel days in factories, young boys with rifles across their shoulders forced marching into war. In the backstreets of the sex trade there are prisoners in the brothels, while lone servants are bullied and abused in the despotic mansions of Mayfair and Belgravia.



Behind me in a war that has no end I hear a nation mourn its dead, the flowers of many forests cut down and trampled beneath the mine and the gun, enemy united with enemy in an unseemly dance of sinew, blood and bone. The little Forest Owlet cries for its home disappeared under the blade of an illicit axe, the Amoy Tiger roars in vain for its dead mate while a single humped back whale sings its eerie threnody to an empty sea. It is as if all the oppressed and dispossessed beings

of the earth are gathered at my back and raise their voices in a great anthem of mourning which first envelopes and then overwhelms me. Numb, I shrink into my orange shell, fold my six legs and await my fate.

The dark canopy falls away and there on a wide sunlit plain, tall figures clothed in light open their arms to sorrow, to despair and to a world full of fear. Then, suddenly, a tigress and her cubs come out of the forest; flowers paint the ground where blood was spilled, and new saplings spring from the craters of urban devastation. Slaves are set free; the starving and the dispossessed are sheltered and fed; old enemies embrace. It is a new song this shining world sings now, an anthem of love and hope.

I make my way along the path through the soft grass into the golden light of a new day, the final leaf of my book. As I approach the old oak board, the gateway back to my home, I pass by the figures of light. One, with eyes deep and dark as the waters of Bethesda, gives me a blessing, and I see that his hands are marked with scars where perhaps iron nails had once been driven through...

Your affectionate Nephew, *A. Bostrychus Capucinus*

Forest Owlet by *Liz Egeböck Foxbrook*

## I AM

*I was regretting the past, and fearing the future.*

*Suddenly My Lord was speaking:*

“My name is I Am.”

He paused. I waited.

He continued, “When you live in the past,  
with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard.

I am not there.

My name is not I Was.

When you live in the future,  
With its problems and fears, it is hard.

I am not there.

My name is not I Will Be.

When you live in this moment,  
It is not hard.

I am here.

My name is I Am.

*Colin Carvel*

## GA MEETINGS AT SWANSEA April 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup>

It was my privilege this year to be the NUF delegate to the Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (usually referred to as the GA) held at Swansea University.

“The GA” is partly a series of business meetings reviewing the activities of the different parts of the denomination over the past year, partly a Unitarian ‘jamboree’ where activists from all over the country renew acquaintance. The Anniversary Service allows delegates a once a year chance to experience worship in a large congregation ; this year the delegates and members of nearby congregations were able to fill the massive Brangwyn Hall, for a Welsh Hymn Singing Festival ( in both English and Welsh) followed by the service, conducted by the Rev. Jeffrey Lane Gould of Padiham chapel which, appropriately to the day focussed on the events of Palm Sunday .

The GA requires stamina – there are the business meetings, spaced through the weekend interspersed by smaller gatherings of separate groups such as the NUF.\* .As there are often three meetings taking place simultaneously it is not possible to attend everything and selection has to be made. Each day starts with early morning devotions ( at 7.30 a.m.!) and with only breaks for meals continues until 9.00 p.m.. I was sorry that fatigue kept me from Monday’s devotions as the services on Saturday and Sunday (a Unitarian communion) were of high quality. Saturday evening brought the meeting–weary delegates refreshment in the form of a concert by a school choir of excellent quality which received a well-deserved standing ovation after a diverse programme of choral and solo items ranging from Abba to Lionel Bart. They were joined by Carwyn Tywyn, newly appointed secretary of the Unitarian Welsh department, who sang in Welsh and played the Celtic knee harp.

The focus of the conference was ‘Celebrating our Volunteers’ and there were live as well as video presentations of Unitarian volunteering throughout the business sessions. Special mention should be made of the youth presentations and the acutely observed monologues written by Kay Millard. Claire Maddocks’ account of the benefits that had accrued to her through volunteering for Unitarian youth events was emotionally moving for many delegates, while the monologues expertly performed by Dorothy Haughton, evinced chuckles of recognition from many in the audience – the timid new member who finds herself church secretary within weeks of joining, being apparently, a not uncommon experience.

The Executive Committee presented the results of their ‘Difficult Choices’ consultation which has issued in a set of four Strategic Priorities for the movement over the next 5 years ;these were identified as local leadership, ministry, public visibility and improved central services. The target over five

years would be to increase membership by 20% and to increase the number of full-time ministers to 50 . Working groups to address these priorities would be set up in the coming months. “Too much organisation, not enough God” was the provocative title of the Renewal Group’s ‘fringe’ meeting; there is an inevitable tension between the independence of separate congregations and the General Assembly but there is no doubt that the four priorities address many of the needs of the small congregations which make up the great proportion of our movement.

It was fitting that the meetings were held in Wales, as they coincided with the retirement of Rev. Eric Jones, Secretary of the Welsh Department of the GA after 40 years. A further timely conjunction was the admission of the Bangor Fellowship to the GA as a ‘small congregation’; proof that it is possible to ‘plant’ Unitarianism in new soil, if you have committed gardeners!

At the end of the Meetings the presidency for the coming year was transferred to Rev. Dr. Ann Peart, with Liz Dyson-Jones becoming vice-president. Neville Kenyon was rightly thanked for his year of service; he presided over the meetings with mayoral-like dignity and good humour and, together with his wife Betty, has been a splendid ambassador for the movement wherever he has gone.

*Ken Smith*

## **DR. JIM FOWLER**

I would like to thank everyone for their kind messages following the recent and sudden death of my father, Dr Jim Fowler.

My father's life may be of interest to Unitarians and others. My dad had a mixed religious background. However, in his latter years, Dad became quite strident in his atheism, based on his professional knowledge of the natural world (he was a retired Lecturer in Biology at De Montford University, Leicester), and latterly the books of Richard Dawkins.

Dad was an enthusiastic blogger, and frequently went head-to-head against Christian fundamentalists in the blogosphere!

However, Dad also became a member of the National Unitarian Fellowship (the society for Unitarians with no regular congregation), after reading one of my NUF newsletters a few years ago, which I think was entitled "A Unitarian-Pagan path?" (or similar).

Dad subsequently contributed to the NUF newsletter as well as the on-line forum. He felt that the Unitarians was a place where he could freely express his views, and receive a fair hearing.

I was somewhat surprised, but quite proud, to hear earlier this year that Dad had registered himself as Unitarian on the 2011 Census form, for which I will take some credit!

(PS, some readers may wonder why I have a different surname from

my late father. This is entirely for reasons within my own family. Although I and Dad disagreed on some issues, (for example, I take great issue with Dawkins' nihilist attitude to faith), my surname is not an indication of some major disagreement between me and Dad! I proudly keep "Fowler" as a middle name, and "Tywyn" is the new Welsh surname I gave to my daughter.)

I look forward to writing again soon in my new capacity of Secretary of the Welsh Department.

*Dr. Carmyn Tynyn*

(Secretary Welsh Department 07973 851590)

## PROMETHEUS

A fulmar, high above the cliff top railings, banks and turns  
into the breeze, marbled wings slender and delicate,  
a mosaic of airy platinum and filigree steel.  
Westward he flies across the bay over the shimmering waves gilded  
by a burnished amber sun,  
and soars into the haze, mother of pearl where the watery horizon  
kisses the melting sky and merges into eternity.  
For one magnificent moment he is silhouetted shadow dark  
against that fiery solar vortex where the souls of the dead are gathering,  
and the resurrection trumpets sound.  
He is gone like smoke absorbed into darkness unseen,  
a silent echo of a song as yet unheard, palpable memory of a forgotten dream,  
jubilant spirit in the sweet air of the morning,  
unbound and free

*Naomi Linnell*

The poem was written with Jim Fowler in mind and is offered here as a tribute to his memory.

## ENGLISH HERITAGE SURVEY

How many of England's **Historic Places of Worship** are at Risk and how are congregations coping? On Wednesday 30 June, English Heritage revealed the results of the first ever sample survey into the condition of England's 14,500 listed historic churches, chapels, synagogues, temples, meeting houses and mosques. It will also publish a free Caring for Places of Worship booklet, DVD and website to guide congregations to all the help and advice they deserve in looking after the nation's most cherished buildings on behalf of us all. For more information go to: [www.english-heritage.org.uk/protecting/heritage-at-risk/places-of-worship-at-risk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/protecting/heritage-at-risk/places-of-worship-at-risk)

Submitted by *Louise Rogers* GA bulletin

## OUR SPONSORED WALK ALONG THE COTSWOLD WAY FOR TYDDYN BACH TRUST

From the beginning, nothing went as planned. We never seemed to stop remaking arrangements.

One of the first things we re-arranged was the number of dogs we took. With our vet's agreement we had intended to take our four dogs. All our dogs are rescues. Our vet did not agree.

He thought the distance too much for Billy with his three legs.

Bax is an old boy in his 11<sup>th</sup> year. His lungs are damaged. The vet believes this is because he has lived in a smoke filled environment. He regularly walks 8 miles in a day but even so, it was felt that the distance, the new territory, the camping could all prove to be too much not just physically but also emotionally.

My vet, who is also a friend said, 'No' to Sally even though she is a well-behaved bundle of energy. Brian, my vet's words were 'It is less than a year since she was successfully living feral and too soon to take her camping on strange territory. No matter how well behaved she is, living out on strange territory she could revert quite quickly, especially if something spooked her.'

We therefore left the three behind with the vets Brian and Jane where they had a wonderful holiday playing with their dogs, swimming their large pond, inspecting their horses, and digging in the hillside.

Lola was the dog who came with us. Lola is young, healthy and stable. However, she could not resist growling at the foxes that came to inspect our tent during the night.

We began our walk in glorious sunshine at Honeybourne. By the time, we came to pitch our tent above Chipping Campden the wind was howling and the clouds gathering. We could only see sufficiently to put up one tent. Around 2 am, it started to rain heavily. What was worse it came into the tent. Luckily, we were able to use the other tent to divert the water.

This bad weather continued for the whole of the next day. The wind came off the escarpment with such strength it nearly blew us off our feet. We were cold, wet, miserable and bad tempered. We were ready to come home before we had started. All we could do was walk.

The day after and from then on, the weather was glorious.

On that very first day amid the howling wind, we met a couple of Australians. They claimed to be able to walk the Cotswold Way in 7 days. Alan thought we could beat them. I wasn't so sure. However, Alan wanted to try. This would mean we would be dependant on buying food not foraging. Foraging can take up a lot of time; you have to find the food, cook or assemble it. I wanted very much to do this, which is why I had brought along my SAS tested gear.

It also meant that we would not have the time to investigate all the ancient and historical sites. We did manage to spend some time around Hailles Abbey when the weather was perhaps at its worst.

I feel I must say I had never before thought of Alan as being competitive.

I must confess too that I found the idea of taking the Australians and perhaps beating them attractive. Therefore, Alan won.

In order to beat them we got up with the first bird and began pitching out tents with the last. I enjoyed listening for the first bird of the dawn chorus, especially at the beginning when I was not so tired. Usually you expect it to be a blackbird but this is not always the case.

The least distance we walked in a day was 14 miles the most 35. We got lost once and added a further 8 miles to our total that day. That was day I had the pleasure of watching a lizard and a hunting spider. It was well worth the extra miles if just to see them!

We heard foxes rummaging around and inspecting our camp during the night but did not see an owl or come across badgers, though we did see plenty of bird life. Alan became quite adept at identifying raptors especially Buzzards.

When we began our walk there was very little readily available to eat, but by the end of our walk, spring was truly happening. Everywhere plants were rushing into new growth. Trees appeared to come into blossom overnight. Mother Nature was showing us just how plentiful and generous she could be. Suddenly where there had been barren fields there were fields of wild garlic, the number of plants we could have picked and eaten were legion but we didn't have the time. We passed many farms selling free ranges eggs, but we had no time to cook them

We did beat the Australians. We walked the Cotswold Way in 5 days. I was completely exhausted and found myself saying, 'I never want to walk up another hill again'. Unfortunately, I live on hill!

And Lola? Poor girl, she was so tired she could not even get up to greet Nigel; she just lay there slowly wagging her tail. She fell asleep so soundly that Alan thought she was dead.

We met some wonderful people and some wonderful animals. One of the highlights was sitting above North Nibley by the Tyndale monument towards the end of our walk just taking in the scenery and thinking about its history. It was this vale that was hit by a Tsunami in or around 1609.

One lady came rushing out of her home one evening as we ascended the particularly steep hill out of Dursley with water for Lola a coffee for us.

'Oh, camp in the woods,' she said. Alan pointed out that the woods were not a campsite. 'So what?' was her retort. 'People always camp in those woods. Nobody minds. It's OK'. So we camped.

We found the Cotswolds to be very dog friendly.

We met one mischievous horse who thought he could have some fun at our expense. I watched as he slowly and carefully, still grazing walked over towards the footpath. Unfortunately, for the horse I had noticed the wicked look in its eye. I mentioned this to Alan who wisely brought Lola close. The horse, as I expected, sulkily moved off. We had spoiled his fun.

I thoroughly enjoyed the experience in spite of being exhausted. I would like to do it again but not at such a speed.

Can we also say a very big 'thank you' to all those people who have sponsored us? To date we have raised over £1,000 for Tyddyn Bach Trust. If there is anyone out there, who has not donated and who wants to it is not too late.

In addition, if anyone wants us to come and talk about the walk for a donation to Tyddyn Bach we are very willing to oblige.

*Alan Myerscough and Wynne Simister*

## **A SERVICE CELEBRATING ANIMALS**

An Animal Celebration was held at Cross Street Chapel on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> May to launch the **Unitarian Animal Welfare Society** in the North West.

Eighteen people attended, some coming from Liverpool.

This was a service with time for everyone who wanted to take part. Most people had a contribution to make.

Peter Sampson began the proceedings by reading a poem and talking about a painting he had brought about dogs.

Other people brought poetry, prose, music to share. Tria brought her rescued cat Gemma, a dark Tortoiseshell. Tria told us Gemma's story and we all enjoyed being introduced to her.

We also lit candles for the animals we had known and loved but who were no longer with us.

There was a retiring collection for World Horse Welfare to help with the work they are instigating in South America particularly Guatemala. We raised £100 - £50 from Golders Green and £50 Cross Street. For information about this work please look on the World Horse Welfare website

We then went into the Percival Suite for a buffet meal consisting of various salads, samosas, spring rolls, fresh fruit and wraps.

Many people present said they hoped we could do this again. We shall see. It was certainly an enjoyable afternoon

*Wynne Simister*

## A DREAM COME TRUE – The Story of Kharang

By Margaret Barr (1899-1973)

This gem of a book written by Margaret Barr and published by the Lindsey Press in 1974 is no longer in print but, fortunately, is available for loan from the NUF Book Collection or can be accessed and downloaded from the GA website:

[http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/publications/1974\\_DreamComeTrue.pdf](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/publications/1974_DreamComeTrue.pdf) .

Unlike other books about Margaret Barr this account takes us directly into her life giving us insights into her experiences, difficulties and friendships in India, but more specifically the attempts to establish non-sectarian education and social provision in the Khasi Hills.

What I have found to be of particular interest is the importance of friendship to Margaret Barr, especially the role of women across the class divide in the India of this time and the crucial support of Unitarian women in the UK, Canada and USA.



Whilst studying at Cambridge it was a friend who took her to the Unitarian chapel there, where she ‘...knew at once that (she) had come home and the quest for a religious affiliation able to satisfy (her) intellectually, emotionally and spiritually was ended’ (P.11). Having been brought up as an evangelical Methodist this move towards an inclusive faith resulted in later difficulties in religious understanding between her and her parents but I do think it gave her insights into the need for non-sectarian education in India as opposed to the government supported missionary schools.

Margaret’s sister Mary was an early influence in her religious and educational development. Mary resigned as a teacher in India for a Wesleyan Methodist Missionary School, joining Mahatma Gandhi as a village worker. Being interested in the Indian National Movement, Margaret visited Mary at the Ashram and was grateful for the advice given to her by Gandhi, directing her towards village work if she wished to be constructive.

Although the GA wanted to support the autonomous Unitarians in the Khasi Hills, they didn’t feel it appropriate that a woman should go to India alone. Being a teacher as well as a Minister, Margaret was undaunted and secured a position at Gokhale Memorial Girls’ School and whilst there developed a course

on World Religions and in 1937 published 'The Great Unity'. [http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/publications/1937\\_TheGreatUnity.pdf](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/publications/1937_TheGreatUnity.pdf) .

During her time at the school she was able to get to know middle class and upper class Indian girls and learn more about education in India. She remained devoted to girls' education throughout her life. During school holidays she was able to visit the Khasi Hills and village churches, firstly accompanied and then alone, learning the language as she got to know the villagers. She was able to write to the GA advising that there could be no objections now that she had proved herself and was on the spot.

In 1935 the GA agreed to fund her for a year to explore possibilities for further developments. Margaret reported back that the best place to set up a permanent centre was Shillong from where she could contribute to the Unitarian movement and education in Khasi. It was never her intention to take leadership of the Khasi Unitarian movement but rather to educate leaders. There was a mixed reaction from the GA but it was the women of the churches who decided to raise enough money for her salary for the next three years. This commitment was continued until she became a pensioner in 1964. The support of Unitarian women can be seen from reports, letters and articles reproduced in: 'A Century of the Unitarian Women's League 1908-2008' edited by Judy Hague and published by the British League of Unitarian and Free Christian Women in 2008. (NUF Book Collection).

Lady Reid, wife of the Governor of Assam was a great friend and influential supporter of Margaret's work. Her role was crucial in ensuring the school at Shillong came to fruition, the school being named after her. Even when she moved from Shillong she tried to organise a Women's Education League.

Margaret Barr described Ellen Giri as her kindred spirit. She too was a teacher who dreamed of establishing a non-sectarian, rural high school with Margaret. However, it wasn't to be as Ellen died before their joint dreams could be moved forward. All hopes were shattered but Margaret recognised that there was still a great need to focus on health, welfare and training even if it meant her first love of educational development had to be sidelined.

Evelyn Shullai was 'the most precious and enduring of my Shillong friendships', a beautiful young woman, educated in Missionary schools, yet sharing Margaret's passion for non-sectarian provision. Becoming a teacher she was someone Margaret could depend on when absent from Shillong.

Without the support of Unitarian women it is unlikely that her dream of setting up the Khasi Rural Centre could ever have been attained. Dr Lotta Hitschmanoua, Director of the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada became a great friend, visiting Margaret at the Centre in India. Appreciating the work that was being done there the USCC agreed to pay the salaries of

three full time workers. Mary Lawrance of California had earlier visited Shillong, returning to America, where she started 'The Friends of Margaret Barr' groups.

On her occasional times away from Khasi Margaret would return to speak at the GA in the UK and other venues around the country as well as Canada, USA and Australia, trying to raise support and finances for her work in India.

In May 1963 she travelled to the USA and received the 'Annual Award for distinguished services to Liberal Religion' from the UUA. Speaking without notes she received a tumultuous reception.

It would be incorrect to think that Margaret Barr restricted her friendships but rather 'A dream come true' demonstrates her ability to connect across class, sex, nationality and age. She is absolutely honest in concluding, that the principle aim with which she had started failed to produce one single trained leader for any Khasi Unitarian Church. Not because of any lack of effort on her part but the lack of interest from the churches themselves.

The above account is selective but does show a continuing thread running right through from the first days of the Unitarian movement, and that is the importance of women networking and their realisation that education and social service is central to their faith.

*Joan Wilkinson*

### **Three blogs by new Ministers introduced at the GA Meetings:**

Rev. Daniel Costley <http://danielc-benge.blogspot.com/>

Rev. Bob Pounder <http://failethnever.blogspot.com/>

Rev. Danny Crosby <http://danny-crosby.blogspot.com/>

### **Document Library**

Two new small sections have been added to the Document Library. Poetry books are in a listing at: [www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/poetry](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/poetry)  
Record books are in a listing at: [www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/records](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/docs/records)  
While there are not many books in these sections at the moment, we are hoping more documents will become available. If you have any material please do contact us.

The Document Library has been given a new homepage that now lists the different types of books available. You can now even list the latest books to be added to the library at:

[www.thega.org.uk/docs/publications/index.php?shelf=Latest](http://www.thega.org.uk/docs/publications/index.php?shelf=Latest).

We are very grateful to Rev Cliff Reed for giving us permission to include '*Spirit of Time and Place*'.

*James Barry* [jbarry@unitarian.org.uk](mailto:jbarry@unitarian.org.uk)

## LOVE (2)

The TV programme 'Blind Date' brought together a number of couples who had not met before and gave them an opportunity to spend a few days together in unusually opulent and enjoyable surroundings. Considering that one of each couple was male and the other female – the combination prescribed and emphasized in the Good Book – it is surprising how few of the 'blind dates' ended up in romance or marriage. It seems that there is more to it than getting the bodies right; there must also be present that attraction of personalities, that magic, that chemistry which exceeds all logic or cold calculation. You can't make one person love another – either it's there or it's not.

Then in this topsy-turvy world of ours, sometimes the opposite happens: a he falls for a he, or a she for a she, and that indefinable attraction casts its spell. In this case the attraction is there but the bodies are not the ones prescribed. This kind of love was eulogised by some philosophers of Ancient Greece and, for a minority of people, has existed in every generation since history began. That in itself is not a reason for accepting it. Prostitution and rape, too, have existed from time immemorial, yet we don't accept these. But where is the love in prostitution or rape? This discussion is of love, not of using or abusing people.

Some recent TV programmes have taken up the issue of children raised in same sex households. In one programme a youth who had experienced living both with a mother and father and living with two men said he had been cruelly treated by his father and mother, whereas he was very happy in his present situation. Other contributors thought that children living in such households would inevitably grow up 'gay', only to be refuted by children who had grown up in such households and who were quite 'straight'. Another worry was that such children may be ribbed mercilessly by school-mates – this is a most important consideration, for children can be cruel and unthinking though they may be merely reflecting the outlook of their parents or of a considerable section of society.

The ordinary household of father and mother does not in itself guarantee the successful upbringing of children – the children may be abused or ill-treated. The outward form, which complies with society's requirements, may sometimes hide an inner misery, whereas a less usual and more frowned-on arrangement may have much happiness. One cannot rely on the outward complying form. In my opinion, much depends on the inner essence – on whether there is a wholesome love there or not.

*George Cope*

You cannot do a kindness too soon,  
for you never know how soon it will be too late.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## LOST

Quietly we wait, our  
Service of listening  
And You, God, Love, surround  
Our prayer hands in yours,  
Kissing my cheek,  
Commissioning to give  
Your kiss to each other.

Now bringing to my mind  
Judas, named the 'Dagger',  
Climbing from Kidron brook  
To Gethsemane, Christ  
Coming, meeting.  
I like to think that Christ,  
Open-armed, embraced, gave  
First kiss as he received  
The agent of your will.

You are there, Love,  
Greeting for this lost man.  
He, nor fraught disciples  
Can see your forgiveness  
So in default, we blame.  
Despairing, he  
Knows not the Risen Lord,  
Goes in desolation  
To his own gibbet cross.  
And yet You love,  
Knowing Judas better than we.  
Waiting to kiss, to heal  
Both him and us.

*Jenny Wightman*

## JULIAN MEETINGS

Anyone interested in learning more about Julian Meetings may wish to visit [www.julianmeetings.org](http://www.julianmeetings.org) A database is available from Anne Stamper at [gbdata@julianmeetings.org](mailto:gbdata@julianmeetings.org) or The Firs, Lewes Rd., Ringmer, Lewes, E. Sussex. She provides details on individual Julian Meetings. All the Julian Meetings work is done by volunteers and replies may take up to 3-4 weeks. It is definitely ecumenical and the meetings have included people of other faiths though CoE Christians predominate.

*Jenny Wightman*

## FAITH AND FREEDOM

The more intellectually inclined among us are probably already acquainted with *Faith and Freedom*, a journal of progressive religion. Two issues annually, published Spring and Autumn. World circulation to ministers and laity. **Editor:** Rev Keith Gilley, 42 Avondale Avenue, London N12 8EN; **[Keith.Gilley@btinternet.com](mailto:Keith.Gilley@btinternet.com)** **Annual subscription:** £15.00 (postage included) in UK.

## FOUR EXPRESSIONS OF GOODNESS

As I have written a number of times in recent years, I regard myself as a Religious Freethinker rather than as a Trinitarian or a Unitarian. How can I possibly know whether God is a Trinity, a Unity or something else, or comprehend God's ways? And how can I accept the shallow dogmatism of the atheist.

Yet I am most certainly a religious person. What the orthodoxy of Mahayana Buddhism makes of the Buddha or of Kuan-yin is for it to decide, just as orthodox Christianity has its own thoughts about Jesus and Mary. For me, all these four figures are traditionally wonderful expressions of compassion and sexual self-control, qualities which I strongly believe we greatly need – as individuals and as humankind.

Since I am totally convinced of the survival of consciousness after physical death, I believe that these great figures are alive, and can be adored. We are free to choose. My choice is Kuan-yin, sometimes called 'The Chinese Goddess of Mercy'. All four saintly ones manifest the same uplifting qualities, and I have found that there is no better way to keep these great ones in our consciousness than by using their names mentally as two-syllable mantras.

How grateful I am to the Unitarian movement for awakening in me an interest in world religions and in life after death! I say a sincere 'thank you'.

*Ross Howard* (GA. Lay Preacher and Guest Contributor)

## THE ABOLITION OF MAN

By C. S. Lewis

This series of three lectures was copyrighted in 1944. While nominally described as ‘reflections on education’, specifically in the upper forms of schools, it is much more than this. Principally it is a critique of the materialist philosophy of the day. This philosophy has continued to penetrate society and those who make plans for society.

He opens with a deceptively limited attack on the notion that qualitative adjectives have only subjective significance, giving the example of whether a waterfall described as ‘splendid’ is merely perceived as such, as the moderns would have it, or is *in itself splendid*. He argues that it *is in itself splendid*. It soon becomes clear that Lewis is concerned with a much more fundamental malaise of which this is only a symptom. He argues that it is meaningless to take the view that objects do not have intrinsic value and that to suggest otherwise devalues the observer as well as the object. He cites a universal essence that lies behind laws both physical and moral which he calls ‘The Tao’. Beyond discussing the qualities of objects he broadens the argument right out to encompass morality itself and whether this has validity above and beyond the subjective judgement of the individual and society.

He has grave concerns about the power of logic and observation to elucidate fundamental moral principles. He dubs secular modernist thinkers ‘Men without Chests’, men without hearts in the figurative sense. He sees their attempts to recreate society and its morality from first principles, using scientific research as a yardstick, full of contradictions. The Tao, he maintains, is fundamental and not open to being rewritten although he allows for some developments in harmony with it. He argues that it cannot be arrived at by a process of reasoning but is rather axiomatic and can only be believed rather than proved. He expands on the nature of the Tao in an appendix. There he lists traditional fundamental moral principles without expanding them into sets of rules using literary and scriptural examples from culturally diverse sources.

Far from a purely academic exercise the purpose of his writing is a warning against a looming and ultimately irreversible series of changes that include the extinction of humanity. But the title does not refer only or even most importantly to this last but more to the death of the soul. He points out that Eugenics and Conditioning are not just the province of Fascism and maintains that they are leading the world to a soulless future. He warns in the strongest terms against the recreation of the moral and psychological landscape through Conditioning and tailoring the human race with Eugenics.

While written 67 years ago this book struck many very strong chords in me. I have never been able to countenance the idea of ‘mere subjectivity’. Ken Wilber has offered a hopeful idea in recent times that postmodernism has

put the observer, the subject, back in the picture. But Lewis only values emotional response if it is in tune with the Tao. In this way he judges it and further to this opposes moral relativism. It is worth raising the question whether things have indeed got to such a sorry pass as that of which Lewis was afraid, in the intervening years, and whether all the change has been for the worse. We are perhaps not as close to the Orwellian nightmare as he may have feared, at this point. Nevertheless it is worth asking ourselves how far we have sleepwalked towards it.

While there is strong correspondence between the quotes he uses in the appendix, *The Tao*, in his terms, is framed in very general principles. Once one looks at more specifics, differences of opinion are bound to emerge between traditions. He is aware of this issue which logically would necessitate following a particular path in practice. He identifies himself as a Christian while stating that his thesis is not specific to a particular religion. He is clear however that *The Tao* as such has to be accepted in toto.

This is a very coherent, clear and well argued account which supports the diligent retention of traditional values. It is also a very challenging stance in the present age. It is still relevant because it raises very important questions about the coherence of the supposed rationality of modern secular thinking. It is well worth reading and is likely to leave a lasting impression on anybody who is concerned about the spiritual health of our affluent age.

*Chris Barchard* (Guest reviewer)

## **MORE BOOKS FROM THE NUF BOOK COLLECTION**

**The Reverend William Turner – Dissent and Reform in Georgian Newcastle upon Tyne** by Stephen Harbottle, published by Northern Universities Press 1997 and **William Gaskell 1805-84 – A Portrait** by Barbara Brill, published by Manchester Literary and Philosophical Publications Ltd 1984, are books that benefit from reading together for anyone interested in early Unitarian history. Their consecutive years of service to the Unitarian ministry span from 1782 through to 1884, William Turner's being at Hanover Square, Newcastle and William Gaskell at Cross Street, Manchester. The two men had much in common, being totally involved in their communities, having the gift of getting on well with men from other faith traditions, in order to move forward education and provision for the poor within their communities. Both were key figures on many committees as well as lecturing and preaching. William Turner had been an influence on the generation of ministers that followed him and we see both a continuation and connection between the two Williams throughout the books. However, the two books are totally different in presentation. The first book, written by Stephen Harbottle, who was the President of the Newcastle Lit &

Phil, is quite dense to read, even on a second reading. Perhaps this is due to the perspective throughout the book being based on men and meetings. Nevertheless, the book must be an invaluable addition to local historians and those living in or near Newcastle as well as social and Unitarian historians. Although the material in Barbara Brill's book is not dissimilar, it is a joy to read straight through without constant reference to minutes and committee details and differences. The book is written from a family perspective with new insights into the married life of Elizabeth, who we learned much more about in 2010, the year of her bicentenary. Together the two men, through their lives, introduce us to over a century of social and Unitarian history through the people they met and the work they did in two great and growing northern cities – their hard work and achievements were impressive.

**The Origin of Satan** by Elaine Pagels of 1995 was published in England by Allen Lane Penguin Press in 1996. The author is a scholar whose areas of research are social history, literature and anthropology from the time and area of the Middle East around the time of Jesus. Six years were spent researching material on this subject to be presented initially in scholarly publications. However, Pagels has the gift of going on to make her material very accessible for the ordinary reader. As with other books by Elaine Pagels, I bought this as soon as it became available and I wasn't disappointed on either the first or second reading, not for any dry amassing of facts but as a way of understanding the origins of what is still relevant today. In the years since reading it the first time the playing out of good v bad, God v the Devil, on the world stage has become even more pronounced in the more fundamentalist wings of the main religious traditions.

This is a social history of Satan as a phenomenon of the development of the Jewish nation and its underpinning religion of Judaism. Satan is surprisingly absent in the Old Testament other than as an angel from God sent to test and guide. The change comes when Satan becomes identified with another ethnic group. However, in the books of the Apocrypha comes the fall from grace and for those who have read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the ground covered will seem familiar. It is during the writing of the New Testament that we see a great change. Satan is no longer identified with the evil ethnic other, but between and within ethnic groups. The battle becomes that between the good and evil, the moral and immoral, this is also a cosmic battle. In the Gospels we see the roots of anti-Semitism developing as the blame for Jesus' death is laid at the feet of sections of the Jewish community considered to be taken over by Satan. Early Christians who believed in the one undivided God, with humans consisting of both good and bad within themselves and recognising this, yet through religious and social practise overcoming evil tendencies and live a moral and spiritual life, were branded as heretics. Their message was: 'know thyself' and behave towards others how

you would like them to behave towards you – the Golden Rule. This approach to accusing someone or some faction within one religion tradition as being Satanic continues within the emerging Christian tradition with anyone straying from the party line being considered to be a heretic.

This strict dualism and cosmic battle between God and Satan continues to this day. This book helps to make readers aware how deeply and with what damaging consequences the world and our relationships with our fellow man has been forged in the fight for power within the social sphere over centuries.

*Joan Wilkinson*

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Letter to Editor of NUF Newsletter from the Committee of the NUF

We write in response to the use of the phrase ‘an influential group of NUF members resolved to issue guidelines’ contained in the Annual Report to members and referred to in issue 395.

Following the publication of issue 392 containing the editor’s piece on Multiculturalism, several committee members and others expressed disquiet at the tone and content of the article. The NUF committee as the people with legal responsibility for the NUF has a duty to ensure that its object and its values are made real.

We do not expect to find ourselves in agreement with all that we read in any Unitarian publication. We fully recognise the challenges of regularly producing a newsletter of this kind largely from contributed articles. We also appreciate the excellent work of the current editor and this debate does not reflect anything to the contrary.

We believe that the editor should be able to exercise discretion in their acceptance, rejection and editing of material as they see fit. But this discretion needs to be exercised within the context that this publication is part of the NUF activities and it is the NUF Committee which carries ultimate responsibility for the publication’s content. Therefore producing editorial guidelines would be one way of fulfilling some of our responsibilities.

*Tony McNeile* (Minister NUF)

*Ken Smith* (Acting Secretary NUF)

*Joan Wilkinson* (Immediate Past Secretary NUF)

*Elizabeth Barlow* (Treasurer NUF)

*Louise Rogers, Alan Oates, Ella Lewis-Jones, Ian Martin, Melanie Prideaux* (Committee Members)

We would request that if any member feels the need to comment further on this matter that they should contact the Acting Secretary in the first instance as we feel this issue is something that reflects on the Fellowship as a whole.

## WEB NEWS

The GA website has an excellent **Worship Resource**, put together by Rev. Dr. Vernon Marshall, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of **Rabindranath Tagore**. Included are poems, prayers, writings, short quotations, a short outline of his life and appropriate hymns.

[http://www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/Tagore\\_worship\\_Pack.pdf](http://www.unitarian.org.uk/pdfs/Tagore_worship_Pack.pdf)

There are other worship packs that members may wish to have a look at or to download and these can be found at:

<http://www.unitarian.org.uk/support/worship.shtml>

Congratulations to **Billingshurst Unitarians** for creating a great article in Wikipedia. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billingshurst\\_Unitarian\\_Chapel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billingshurst_Unitarian_Chapel)

## DIARY DATES

**Summer Ball at Hucklow** So often trips to the Nightingale Centre in Derbyshire focus so much on a specific activity there is no time to relax and just enjoy the centre and its surroundings. There is no such problem for the weekend 12<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> August, timed to enable visitors to see the village at its best with the 'well-dressing' festival and a dance in the Peach Hall on the Saturday night. For more details see: [www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk](http://www.thenightingalecentre.org.uk)

**Hucklow Summer School - Unitarian RE Week 20th-27th August 2011  
Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow**

There are still a few places left at this year's summer school. Please email [info@hucklowsummerschool.org.uk](mailto:info@hucklowsummerschool.org.uk) as soon as possible if you are interested.

This year's theme is "*Walking the Talk: Living a Life of Greater Integrity*". There will be a full programme of theme talks, morning engagement groups, optional afternoon and evening activities, and opportunities for fun and fellowship. The standard rate for adults is £440. Bursaries are available to help with the cost. Full details can be found on our website:

[www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk](http://www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk)

## NEXT ISSUE

The deadline for the next issue is Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2011. Contributions on any theme and responses to any item in the newsletter are always welcome. All contributions are acknowledged.

The views expressed in the newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the NUF or of the wider Unitarian movement. All contributors are members of the NUF except where otherwise indicated.